

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN
DR. SIMPSON, DR. RAMSBOTHAM,
AND DR. LEE,
IN RELATION TO UTERINE HÆMORRHAGE
FROM PLACENTAL PRESENTATION.

Note by Dr. Simpson.

It has already been shown (see GAZETTE for October 10) that Dr. Lee, while anxious to criticise others for statistical mistakes regarding placental presentations, has himself committed and published no small variety of numerical errors respecting the limited portion of placental cases that have occurred in *his own* practice. Thus, *first*, in his Clinical Midwifery, he states his recorded cases as 35 instead of 36; *secondly*, in one part of his "Lectures," he states the cases there tabulated as 36 instead of 38; *thirdly*, in the MEDICAL GAZETTE for Sept. 19, the sum total of his placental cases should be 44 instead of 43; *fourthly*, in the GAZETTE of last week, the ultimate case should be numbered 46, instead of 45; *fifthly*, all the eight numbers attached to his table of eight cases, in the GAZETTE for Sept. 19, are individually wrong; *sixthly*, among his placental cases, in his Clinical Midwifery, he has omitted any case under No. 290; *seventhly*, out of exactly the same 36 cases, he makes in his Clinical Midwifery 11, and in his Lectures 13, be complicated with rigidity of the os uteri, &c.

These errors, however, are trivial in degree compared with a strange and unfortunate statistical mistake which Dr. Lee has committed in the last week's GAZETTE.* He has there published the results of 89 cases of placental presenta-

tion that have occurred in the practice of the respected Dr. Merriman. In a table which Dr. Lee gives of these cases, he makes Dr. Merriman lose 67 mothers out of the 89, or about 3 in 4; and save 22, or 1 in 4. The opposite, however, must evidently be the truth—that 22 of the mothers died, or 1 in 4; while 67 recovered, or 3 in 4.*

These and the various other numerical inaccuracies which Dr. Lee is well known to have published in regard to the placental cases of *other* authors, will, it is hoped, render him in future a more charitable critic on this subject, seeing he is himself so *very* far from being infallible.

No. 1.—*Letter from Dr. Simpson to Dr. Ramsbotham.*

Stafford House, London, Sept. 20, 1845.

My dear sir,—I have had sent after me to London a collection of letters which had come to Edinburgh after my departure. Amongst them I find one† from you in reference to the report which I have given (in the March Number of the Edinburgh Monthly Journal) of the maternal mortality amongst the patients of the Royal Maternal Charity in cases of unavoidable hæmorrhage. I hasten to assure you that it gives me much pain to think that any unintentional mistake of mine should have

* See Correspondence, p. 1080. The error was in Dr. Merriman's manuscript, from which the table was printed.—ED. GAZ.

† The tenor of Dr. Ramsbotham's letter was of the same nature as that of his two notes to Dr. Lee, published (p. 896) in the MEDICAL GAZETTE for 19th September; and, in the same way, stated the number of maternal deaths at the Maternity Charity from placental presentations to be 15 only out of 50 cases; while the number of children lost was 32. He mentioned, also, as in his notes to Dr. Lee, that the 44 cases of unavoidable hæmorrhage spoken of in his work on Obstetric Medicine, were all cases of *partial* presentation of the placenta.

To save repetition, Dr. Ramsbotham's first letter is not given. The letter bearing upon the subject will be found at p. 12.

given you a moment's annoyance, as nothing could be further from my wishes than to do so.

The paper you refer to is a statistical one, requiring no small degree of labour on my part; and I was at last obliged to print it amidst all the hurry and turmoil of a busy academic session. You are well aware of the almost insuperable difficulty of securing perfect accuracy in such tabular returns. I had occasion, some time ago, to point out to yourself, when writing you on the subject, an error of some importance in your own printed returns of placental cases belonging to the Maternity Charity. To ensure as great accuracy as possible in the various tables which I published in the memoir referred to, all the data in them were gone over more than once, and I was assisted by Dr. Keith and other friends in revising them; and the results, as they now stand, give no adequate idea of the labour expended in arriving at these results. For instance, in order to obtain as many data as possible from the fifty cases of placental presentation which had been recorded by you as occurring in the practice of the Maternity Charity, I searched over all the different volumes of the *MEDICAL GAZETTE*, in which your reports are contained, and entered each individual case by itself in a table shewing, under different headings, the number of the pregnancy, the date at which labour supervened, &c. &c. &c. Two contiguous columns contained the entries of the "results to the child," and the "results to the mother." In summing up the fifty resulting lines containing your fifty different cases, in order to get the single line to be found in the table which you complain of, I had either inadvertently entered, or subsequently copied the results to the child for the results to the mother, and the reverse. If the "results to the child" had been published in the first part of

the Memoir, I should at once have seen the error, and corrected it; but unfortunately I held the results to the child, in yours and other cases, in reserve for future publication.

Before leaving Scotland, I had nearly passed through the press, and had ready for separate publication, a long Memoir on the whole subject of the treatment of unavoidable hæmorrhage by the extraction of the placenta *before* the child. In that Essay you will find the error I had made on your returns acknowledged and rectified, though (if I recollect properly) I still make out the number of maternal deaths to be different from you. However, a special reference to each fatal case is given.

You state in your letter that the 44 cases of placental presentation which I have appended to your name in the table were all cases of *partial placenta prævia*. I am quite aware of it. The table was made to shew the maternal mortality in *all* varieties of the complication, and under *all* modes of treatment—whether the membranes merely were ruptured, or the child turned, or the placenta spontaneously expelled, or the mother sunk without aid of any kind. If I had rejected the partial placental cases, such as your 44, because they were not so fatal as the complete, or the cases in which the liquor amnii was artificially evacuated, or the placenta spontaneously separated and expelled, because they were by no means so fatal as the turning cases, I might have easily brought out a result apparently stronger, but it would have been at the expense of strict and truthful accuracy. The proportion of maternal deaths under turning in placenta prævia, and where the presentation was generally central, forms, you will find, a subject of inquiry in a later part of the Essay. I hope to be able to send you a copy of the Essay itself in a few days after I return to Edinburgh.

In conclusion, allow me to state, that in lecturing and otherwise, I have repeatedly held up your returns of the practice of the Maternity Charity as the most remarkable in our professional annals, both for their intrinsic excellence, and for the very great practical success which they display in the treatment of the patients belonging to the Institution.

And believe me, my dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

To Dr. Ramsbotham.

[*Addendum*.—I have omitted to state, in the preceding letter, the way in which I was led to estimate the number of deaths among the infants in Dr. Ramsbotham's placental presentations as 33 instead of 32. (See MEDICAL GAZETTE for Sept. 19, p. 896). In Dr. Ramsbotham's Reports from 1829 to 1843, the number of infantile deaths in unavoidable hæmorrhage amounts to 31. The return for each of these years in the GAZETTE explicitly mentions the precise number lost in placental presentations. It is not so in the report for 1828 (MED. GAZ. Vol. III.) During that year 4 children are returned as born dead after severe uterine hæmorrhage, *without* its being specified whether these deaths were in connection with unavoidable or accidental floodings. As I found 3 cases of unavoidable, and 3 cases of accidental hæmorrhage in the list for that year, I divided, in want of more precise information, the number of infantile deaths equally between them, two to each, and hence made the whole number in placental presentations amount to 31+2 or 33. Dr. Ramsbotham, however, assures me, that among the three unavoidable hæmorrhages of that year only 1 child was lost; while in the 3 accidental hæmorrhages all the children were born dead.]

No. 2.—*From Dr. Simpson to Dr. Ramsbotham.*

My dear sir,—As soon as I received your letter last week, I wrote off to Edinburgh to have sent up to me here the original long manuscript table that had been constructed from your reports of the placental cases at the Maternity Charity, published in different volumes of the MEDICAL GAZETTE, and that formed the basis of my calculations regarding them.

My assistant and friend, Dr. Keith, tells me, in a note which I have this morning received from him, that he cannot lay his hands upon the Table, amidst the present state of confusion of my books and papers. The fact is, I lately went into a new house in Edinburgh, and the workmen and painters are still so busy with it, that everything is as yet entirely out of its place. Dr. Keith, however, has furnished me with some loose notes, which partly supply the defect. These notes confirm the impression which I mentioned to you in my last letter, that you were somewhat in error in your own account of your own placental cases.

The period of the reports of the Maternity Charity, to which your calculations and mine equally refer, are from 1828 to 1843, both years included.

In your excellent work on Obstetric Medicine, you twice state (see p. 725, and again p. 726), and found calculations upon the number of placental presentations occurring during the above period, as amounting to *Forty*. At p. 721, and in your later letter to me, you calculate them as *fifty* in number. Their actual number (I believe you will find) to be *fifty-one*, viz., III. in the year 1828; I. in 1829; II. in 1830; III. in 1831; III. in 1832; II. in 1833; I. in 1834; III. in 1835; VIII. in 1836; III. in 1837; I. in 1838; V. in 1839; X. in 1840; I. in 1841; IV. in 1842; and I. in 1843.

In your letter to me, you state the

number of maternal deaths in these placental cases as *fifteen*: I find *sixteen* deaths among the mothers in the cases mentioned in your published reports, viz. I. in the report for 1829; I. in 1830; I. in 1832; I. in 1833; I. in 1836; I. in 1837; III. in 1839; IV. in 1840; II. in 1842; and I. in 1843.

I have been thus particular in noting the years, because, as you are aware, it is not always very easy to discover the precise results of the placental cases, from the form in which you have arranged and published your reports in the GAZETTE. And if, in comparing the above list with yours, you detect any error, however slight, I shall, I sincerely assure you, feel very greatly obliged by your pointing it out to me, and be delighted to correct my tables accordingly, my great object of course being as great a degree of accuracy in them as possible.

I do not think that the returns of Lying-in Hospitals afford us by any means such correct estimates of the frequency and fatality of placental presentations, as of other obstetric complications: for women do not seek, and are generally not admitted into them, but at or near the full time, while the most common, and also certainly the most dangerous cases of unavoidable hæmorrhage, are found occurring from the sixth to the ninth month. Only two, for instance, of Dr. Collins' eleven hospital cases were premature; the other nine were at the full term. Hence the value, in one respect, of returns like those of the Maternity Charity.

I was very sorry I missed seeing you to-day when you called. Professor Liebig was here at the time.

Believe me, my dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

To Dr. Ramsbotham.

Stafford House, London,
26th Sept., 1845.

No. 3.—*From Dr. Ramsbotham to Dr. Simpson.*

My dear sir,—I thank you much for your letter of yesterday. I had already detected an omission of one case of placental presentation among my published reports, having looked carefully over both the original tables and the summary in the GAZETTE since I wrote you to Edinburgh. I could not at first account for it, but now it has become quite clear to me.

For the sake of greater accuracy, and less chance of error, as I thought, I compiled the tables published in the GAZETTE for August 9th, of last year, from my *manuscript*, instead of taking them from the published yearly statement; and I find that in the year 1837, one of the shoulder presentations, which was also complicated with placenta prævia, had been overlooked, as regarded the latter irregularity, by me, owing to the manner in which I had entered the case in my column for "Remarks;" so that I left it out, introducing it only as a transverse presentation. Thus my *extra* anxiety for correctness in respect to those tables from which I drew my calculations, led me into a mistake. One death I *purposely* omitted,—and it occurs in the same year,—because, although the patient had been delivered under a placental presentation, that irregularity could have had nothing to do with her death. She recovered perfectly, had been for many days engaged in domestic affairs, though she had never left her house; our superintendence of her had ceased; and on the day month from her delivery she was seized with a fit of apoplexy or convulsions, while in a violent passion, and died almost immediately. From this history you will agree with me, I think, that I am fully warranted in omitting the case as one of death *consequent* upon placental presentation in my synopsis. I have no doubt this woman would have been

restored to health, had it not been for this unfortunate intemperance.

We have already had a correspondence, you may recollect, about the *forty* instead of *fifty*. Both in the *GAZETTE*, and the volume, in the *table* the number stands as 50, while in the calculations founded on the tables 40 is printed instead. Indeed the fault was mine, or a friend's who copied for me; for the calculations are deduced from 40, and not 50; shewing that it is not an error of the press, but one of transcription.

Believe me, my dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,

FRANCIS H. RAMSBOTHAM.

14, New Broad Street,
Sept. 26th, 1845.

No. 4.—*Dr. Simpson to Dr. Ramsbotham.*

My dear sir,—For your last note I return you my best thanks. On Saturday I went down into Berkshire, or you would have heard from me sooner.

I am happy to think that you are convinced that my summing up of your cases of placental presentations is so far more correct than your own, notwithstanding the very great pains you have manifested upon their calculations. If I was anxious to adduce any evidence of the care I had bestowed on the inquiry, I could not desire a stronger testimonial.

In page 725 of your work, the number of placental presentations should stand as 1 in 700·8, instead of 1 in 893·5; and at page 726, the number of children lost in placental presentations should stand as 62·3 per cent., instead of 80·0 per cent.

You will find in my Essay, when published, one or two slight corrections in the tables; and I am sure you will readily grant me, that seeing the difficulty of making out accurately, and at first, *one* set of cases like your own, I may be excused if, in summing up various sets of them, I fell into one or

two trivial errors with Smellie and others, whose cases were scattered, and difficult to collect and compare.

I have seen Dr. Lee's paper in the *MEDICAL GAZETTE* of the 19th, to which your note a few days ago referred me, and have been both grieved to witness its improper tone, and at the same time amused by its odd mistakes. It is confessedly difficult to avoid arithmetical blunders, but surely it is possible to avoid such errors in regard to history and matters of fact, as he has committed. I know not how I have happened to excite so much of his displeasure. He and I used to be good friends. In lecturing, I have always maintained that English midwifery was much indebted to him for pressing upon our notice, and so far confirming, some of the *pathological* views of our continental neighbours, regarding phlebitis, and fibrous tumours of the uterus. It is true that I have, at the same time, constantly looked with distrust upon his anatomical labours, because there he ventured on a field that was quite alien to his other pursuits; and I have ever doubted whether his supposed anatomical discoveries would ultimately prove anything more than mere anatomical errors. His two highest attempts in this direction, have been his paper on the Structure of the Placenta, and his later Essay on the Nerves of the Uterus during Pregnancy,—both published in the *Philosophical Transactions*. The first of these papers was published about 1832, and Dr. Lee himself has lately admitted, that a year or two afterwards, he found that his alleged discovery regarding the placenta, was a pure anatomical mistake. For my own part, I believe he will betimes confess the same regarding the uterine nerves. I know well he brought forward some time ago, from various anatomists and physicians, written evidence of the strongest kind, in fa-

your of his views. It was to my mind suspiciously strong. Professor Tiedemann published a description and engravings of the Nerves of the Pregnant Uterus about 1822. Dr. Lee began his investigations in 1837 or 1838, or nearly sixteen years afterwards; yet one of the testimonials published by Dr. Lee in support of his anatomical views was so exceedingly determined as to certify against the very progress of time itself, and suggested that Dr. Lee's investigations were anterior to Professor Tiedemann's. See the good-natured testimonial given by Dr. John Davy to Dr. Lee, and printed with the others in the GAZETTE. You are probably aware that Mr. Beck here, has more lately and elaborately pursued the same inquiry into the uterine nerves, having begun it, I believe, to prove Dr. Lee's dissections right, and ending by demonstrating them to be wrong. Some of the gentlemen that certified for Dr. Lee, are now, I am told, quite convinced that Mr. Beck is correct, and Dr. Lee the reverse. Drs. Todd, Sharpey, Owen, Quain, Bowman, and other distinguished anatomists, who have examined Mr. Beck's beautiful dissections, are, I have been credibly informed, no longer in any doubt whatever, that Dr. Lee is altogether in error on the whole subject, and has uselessly thrown away much valuable time on the inquiry. Surely, my conscientious and confessed belief of all this, however, and my trust, with others, in the perfect accuracy of Mr. Beck, is no reason for having recourse to the remarks of those which compose the latter part of Dr. Lee's communication to the GAZETTE.

After reading Dr. Lee's observations in the GAZETTE, I wrote him a private note, in which (I hope) I used no expression of recrimination, and asked him if he would kindly point out to me any other arithmetical inaccuracies he might have observed in my paper. I

received in answer no reply to my request, but he sent me a perverted statement of Portal's cases that had nothing to do with the matter. I knew that he was intimate with Portal's work, and was certainly more than surprised by his deliberate and uncalled for misstatement regarding that author's cases. It must pain every friend of Dr. Lee's and of the profession to see him following such conduct. I am sorry to add, that in another note, he insisted upon repeating his misstatement to me. Of course, I had no alternative but to decline any more of a correspondence in which such principles were betrayed.

Believe me, my dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

To Dr. Ramsbotham.

Stafford House, Sept. 1845.

No. 5.—*From Dr. Simpson to Dr. Lee.*

My dear sir,—A few days ago I received from Dr. Ramsbotham a letter, stating that you had directed his attention to some arithmetical inaccuracies in an Essay of mine, published in Dr. Cormack's Journal for last March.

I inclose you a copy of my answer to Dr. Ramsbotham's very kind and gentlemanly letter.

As I am publishing the same Essay in a separate and extended form, and am very anxious it should be as free from arithmetical errors as possible, I shall feel deeply obliged by your mentioning, or noting down for me, any other errors that you may have detected among the figures.

Any one who has worked at medical statistics, of the kind included in the Essay in question, knows how difficult, or indeed almost impossible, it is to go through all the different steps of extracting the required data, making the calculations from these data, arranging and copying the calculations when made, and finally getting them through

the hands of the printer, without some errors. And certainly there is no department of authorship in which one stands more in need of, and ought to feel more grateful for, the kindly correction and assistance of his professional brethren, even though, as in Dr. Ramsbotham's case, they do not alter the resulting statistical fact, or alter it only in a fractional degree. Besides, the investigation is of such a kind, that two persons, with every anxiety for truth and accuracy, may read and interpret differently the very data upon which we have to work. Among Dr. Collins' returns, for instance, of his own practice in the Dublin Hospital, I make out one death *more** from unavoidable hæmorrhage than he does. On the other hand, Dr. Churchill (see the article "Hæmorrhage," in his general work on Midwifery) has given a fuller list of cases and deaths from unavoidable hæmorrhage, in Smellie's practice, than I could find *at the time* in Smellie's Works; and yet he ultimately arrives at the same general statistical fact that I have done, namely, that taking a large series of cases, it will be found that *one out of every three mothers dies* under this presentation of the placenta. In the same way, while Dr. Churchill makes Giffard's recorded cases of unavoidable hæmorrhage amount to 29, I could find only reports of 24; and you state somewhere that he has about 20. Again, in your Clinical Midwifery, you state that Portal's Treatise contains an account of "eight" cases of uterine hæmorrhage from presentation of the placenta; whilst I make out (if I recollect properly) that he notices and describes the results of thirteen or fourteen cases, which he had himself met with in his own practice.

I have intended to look in upon you for some mornings past, but I find the

* See Case No. 11, in his chapter on arm presentations.

early part of the day generally dissipated here by various employments before I well know that the day has really begun.

Very truly yours,

J. Y. SIMPSON.

To Dr. Lee.

Stafford House, St. James's,
23d Sept., 1845.

No. 6.—*From Dr. Lee to Dr. Simpson.*

4, Saville Row, 23d Sept., 1845.

Dear sir,—As you are so much engaged, I should be sorry that you should put yourself about by calling upon me. Respecting Portal's cases, it will be seen that, in my Clinical Midwifery, I refer to eight cases "in which he found the placenta not merely at the mouth of the womb, but adhering to the whole neck of the uterus,"—thus pointedly distinguishing them from the other cases of partial placental presentation related in his work, or referred to without the details being given.—I remain, dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,

R. LEE.

To Dr. Simpson.

No. 7.—*From Dr. Simpson to Dr. Lee.*

Dear sir,—I did not in my last note mention the mistake into which you had fallen, with regard to the exact number of Portal's cases, with any idea whatever of blaming you for an error of the kind. In fact, though you state in your Clinical Midwifery that "Portal's Treatise (1685) contains an account of eight cases of uterine hæmorrhage in which," &c.; you more correctly observe, in your newly published Lectures, that "Portal's Treatise (1685) contains the histories of eight *or more* cases of uterine hæmorrhage, in which he found, on introducing the hand to turn, that the placenta was not merely at the os uteri, but adhering to the cervix all round."

If you had at once allowed to me, that Portal had met with thirteen or

fourteen instances of placental presentation, and that you were wrong in limiting the total number of his observed cases to eight, I am sure neither I, nor any one else, could have attached any the slightest blame to you; for we are all more or less liable to commit errors, and, as I formerly observed, are all anxious to correct them when pointed out.

But I must confess that I do most sincerely grieve and lament to observe the mode and means by which you attempt (in the note I have just received from you), to escape from the numerical error into which you had fallen. For I can assure you that Portal does *not* in his work relate or refer to one single instance of *partial* placental presentation. And I fear I must at the same time believe, that you know all his placental cases accurately, for you have published a lengthened and careful analysis of them in your printed lectures.

I have the honour to be,

Yours, &c.

To Dr. Lee. J. Y. SIMPSON.

Stafford House, 24th September, 1845.

No. 8.—*Dr. Lee to Dr. Simpson.*

4, Saville Row, 25th Sept. 1845.

Dear sir,—I am sorry to differ from you, but it is still my opinion that Portal's book contains the histories of eight cases of complete placental presentation, and that all the others were cases of partial placental presentation.—I remain, dear Sir,

Very truly yours,

To Dr. Simpson. R. LEE.

No. 9.—*From Dr. Simpson to Dr. Lee.*

Dear sir,—The "eight" cases of placental presentation which Portal has detailed at full length, were all cases in which (to use again *your own words*) "the placenta was not merely at the os uteri, but adhering to the cervix all round." Hence, I take it you will grant that *they* were complete placental presentations; you tell me, however, in your note of the 23d, that in describing those eight cases in language like the above, you "thus pointedly distinguished them from the

other cases of partial placental presentation related in his work, or referred to without the details being given." I have procured here a sight of Portal's work, lest my memory should have possibly deceived me, and find that the other cases (six in number), are as follows. After relating Case 29, in which the head of the child, in its exit through the os uteri, actually perforated THROUGH the placenta itself, (the placental presentation being hence complete), Portal adds, that not long afterwards he "delivered a gentlewoman in St. Dennis Street, under the *same* circumstances in the presence of Dr. Linkard," &c. In Case 51, Portal tells us, that the placenta was "placed just before, and quite across the whole inner orifice of the uterus," and "in concluding (I now again quote your own words), the history of this case (51), he states, that in the year 1683 he had completed the delivery successfully in five *similar* cases, all the women having recovered." (Dr. Lee's Lectures, p. 366). "In the year 1683," observes Portal, in his own account, "I delivered five women under the *same* circumstances, &c."

Assuredly, there is not one hint or syllable regarding these "other" cases, or any one of them being *partial* placental presentations, but the reverse.

I feel again compelled to deplore deeply your thus venturing for a *second* time to resort to misstatement, in order to try to cover what was originally a very simple and very pardonable error, regarding the number of Portal's recorded cases. And you must really excuse me if I decline any farther correspondence on this subject.

I have the honour to be,

Your most obedient servant,

To Dr. Lee. J. Y. SIMPSON.

Stafford House, 27th October, 1845.

No. 10.—*From Dr. Lee to Dr. Simpson.*

4, Saville Row, 29th Sept., 1845.

Sir,—Nobody asked you to correspond with me respecting Portal's cases, or any thing else. You require, I perceive, a little of the discipline which was so efficacious in the case of your hoaxing friend.—I am, sir, yours, &c.

R. LEE.

To Dr. Simpson.